

Rose Hill
Woods Road
Tivoli Vicinity
Dutchess County
New York

HABS No. NY-5626-

HABS
NY,
14-TIV.V,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROSE HILL

HABS No. NY-5626

Location: Woods Road, Tivoli vicinity, Dutchess County, New York

Present Owner: Dr. Joseph Beasley

Present Use: Vacant.

Statement of Significance: John Watts de Peyster (1821-1906) purchased land at Snake Point from Eugene Livingston, his wife's cousin, of the adjacent Teviot. In 1843, he had erected a large Tuscan Villa which he named Rose Hill. The Tuscan Villa was then popular for country estates. Flanking wings and a tower containing a library were added later. The estate also included flower gardens, stables and farm buildings. After de Peyster's death, Rose Hill became the Leake and Watts Orphan House. Dorothy Day, a leader of the Catholic Worker Movement, purchased Rose Hill in 1964. The Catholic Worker Movement operated Rose Hill as a farm until 1978. Rose Hill is one of twenty-one contiguous estates along the east bank of the Hudson from Stratsburg to Tivoli, New York.

PART I. HISTORICAL HISTORY

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The main block and porch were built in about 1843. The de Peyster's first two children, John Watts, Jr., and Frederic, were born in New York City. The third and fourth were born at "The Lodge, Snake Point, Red Hook, Dutchess County." Snake Point was an earlier name for the Rose Hills property, and the name "The Lodge" may imply something was grand than the current house. The last de Peyster child, Maria, was born on July 7, 1852 in "the Main Mansion, Snake Point, Tivoli, Red Hook, Dutchess County.

Some physical evidence suggests that the porch may have been constructed on an earlier foundation. The deed conveying title to de Peyster in 1843 makes no mention, however, of any dwelling on the property.

2. Architect: None known. De Peyster may have acted as his own architect.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

1843 Deed August 5, 1843, recorded September 11, 1843, in Liber 76 page 345

Eugene A. Livingston and Harriet, his wife
to

John Watts de Peyster for \$5654.53. A parcel of 25 acres, 21 perches, at Snake Point, Tivoli, Dutchess County

1905 Deed June 16, 1905, recorded July 12, 1905, in Liber 340 on page 1

John Watts de Peyster, "...widower of Rose Hill, Tivoli, P.O., Red Hook, Dutchess County, New York, grandson of the Hon. John Watts, who was founder and endower of the Leake and Watts Orphan House of New York City and later Yonkers, the son and only child of Mary Justina Watts (de Peyster) youngest daughter of Hon. John Watts and Jane de Lancey"

to

Leake and Watts Orphan House for "...one dollar and Love, Honor, and veneration for his Grandfather..."

1953 Deed March 16, 1953, recorded March 25, 1953, in Liber 826 page 344

The Leake and Watts Children's Home, Inc.

to

A. Howard Fingar for \$17,500 cash and a mortgage of \$12,500, total consideration: \$30,000. Certain parcels in the town of Red Hook, including the Mansion site of 25 acres, 21 perches (Parcel A)

1964 Deed November 20, 1964, recorded November 20, 1964, in Liber 1158 on page 341

A. Howard Fingar

to

Dorothy Day for \$8000.00. Parcels totalling 62.11 acres including the site of Rose Hill. Being part of what he got in 1953.

4. Builders, Suppliers: None known. De Peyster expressed interest in the management of Rose Hill and may have acted as what we call today a "general contractor." Supplies and workmen for elaborate finish work such as fireplaces, ceilings and mouldings may have been imported from New York City where de Peyster also maintained a residence. Local craftsmen and builders probably built the rest.
5. Original plans and construction: The main block probably was constructed first in about 1843. The north wing was put up next and the south wing was added between 1846 and 1852. The tower was erected before 1860.
6. Alterations and additions: No changes were made between 1860 and de Peyster's death in 1907. Toilets and lavatories were installed in the basement of the north wing by the Leake and Watts Children's Home, Inc.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

John Watts de Peyster, for whom Rose Hill was constructed, was the heir of a prominent and wealthy family. His wife was comprised of strenuous and unintellectual activity, offset by apparently severe psychosomatic illness. In his writing, de Peyster spoke of the great reserves of

strength he experienced when his activities were successful contrasted with debilitating sickness when his fortunes spun downward. He thought that his life should be one of service to society. Consequently, he pursued activities that he believed necessary for the protection and preservation of society: firefighting and the militia.

John Watts de Peyster was born in New York City on March 9, 1821, the son of Mary Watts and Frederick de Peyster. His mother died on July 28, 1821. De Peyster was raised by his grandfather, John Watts, of New York until Watts' death in 1836. The young de Peyster was taught by a succession of tutors and in private schools. In 1834 he made his first European trip. Until he attained his majority, he was supervised by his father, Frederick de Peyster, who had since remarried.

In 1837 his father left public service. He had been a lawyer and had served as New York's Master in Chancery from 1820-1837. According to de Peyster, these years between his grandfather's death in 1836 and his marriage in 1841, were marred by rebellion against the unclear wishes of his father. These were also the years of de Peyster's active engagement in volunteer firefighting, brief attendance at Columbia University and an unaccompanied trip to Europe.

Little is known of de Peyster's relationship with his wife, Estelle, the daughter of John Swift Livingston. She was born on March 2, 1819 and was two years older than her husband. They were married in New York on March 2, 1841, a week before de Peyster's twentieth birthday. Their five children were: John Watts de Peyster, Jr., born December 2, 1841; Frederic de Peyster, born December 13, 1842; Estelle Livingston de Peyster, born June 7, 1844; Johnston Livingston de Peyster, born June 14, 1846, and Maria Livingston de Peyster, born July 7, 1852. De Peyster's biographer makes mention of Mrs. de Peyster's death but without the sentimental recollection accorded others de Peyster knew. She may have influenced de Peyster's choice of settling in the Hudson River Valley among the Livingstons. De Peyster did note his wife planted and cared for the ivy at St. Paul's Church in Tivoli.

De Peyster selected the name Rose Hill because his grandfather Watts had a summer home of the same name at the north end of Manhattan, which in turn was named after the Watts estate, Rose Hill, near Edinburgh. De Peyster never visited the Edinburgh house, nor used it or his grandfather's estate as a model for Rose Hill in Tivoli.

Wallace Bruce reported in his book The Hudson (1907) that General de Peyster has informed him that it was Rose Hill whose cellar saved it from the torch of British General Vaughn in 1777. One Hudson River Valley landowner, either a Tory or clever, told the British that they didn't want to burn his house. To convince his guests, the landowner entertained them liberally with wines from his cellar, and concluded by providing directions to Clermont, the Livingston estate. This is the only documented account where de Peyster claimed this distinction for Rose Hill. Usually the house cited is Green Hill, now known as the Pyres.

One of de Peyster's closest friends was William Pratt Wainwright (1818-1895). Like de Peyster, Wainwright also had married a Livingston, Cornelia Ridgely Tillotson (1830-1918), granddaughter of Thomas Tillotson (Washington's Surgeon-General for the Northern Armies) and his wife Margaret Livingston Tillotson, sister of the famous Chancellor Robert R. Livingston. Cornelia was a cousin by blood to both John Watts and Estelle Livingston de Peyster. Although older than de Peyster, Wainwright was the subordinate in rank. During de Peyster's frequent leaves, Wainwright often served as interim commander of their militia unit. As de Peyster once wrote, "Gentlemen of leisure, residing at our country estates, Colonel WAINWRIGHT and myself ..."

PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A valuable historical and architectural source is de Peyster's own description of Rose Hill published in his 1881 pamphlet Local Memorials. The description is much the same as that printed in Philip Smith's General History of Dutchess County of 1877 as well as an 1871 account reprinted in Allaben's biography of de Peyster. Rose Hill was "one of the loveliest spots conceivable," with "primeval trees" in "natural and romantic wilderness." Of the house de Peyster wrote,

Rose Hill itself has grown like one of the old English family houses, with the increase of the family, until in strange but picturesque outline--the prevailing style being the Italian--somewhat in the shape of a cross; it is now 114 feet long by 87 feet deep. The tower in the rear, devoted to library purposes, rises to the height of about sixty feet.

The library is...a curiosity shop; not only for the bibliophile but for a curio-seeker.

Among his collection of curios, de Peyster numbered a "vast basalt image of Centeotl, the Aztec Goddess of Plenty, miniature bronzes, swords with Damascus blades, Japanese knives of wood," and numerous flags and weapons including the Ferguson rifle, the first breach-loading rifle. He also owned several family portraits, tableware, and the seal of the first de Peyster in America.

The best contemporary account of Rose Hill was published in Allaben's biography, and may have been written by de Peyster.

The following interesting account of "Rose Hill" appeared anonymously in the Poughkeepsie Weekly Eagle, of 30 December 1871. Anyone who has visited the place will appreciate the picture.

A few days ago I happened to be detained at a station on the Hudson River Railroad named Tivoli, opposite the Saugerties Iron Works, and, having a few minutes on my hands, I wandered up into the woods, north of the depot. I found a good graveled road climbing a steep hill, carried along the edge of a slope, supported in places by a wall embodying cyclopien stones, and,

continuing on underneath an evergreen foliage, came upon a dwelling which well repaid my walk. It was as queer a conglomeration of styles as can well be imagined; some forty paces long, cross-shaped, recalling European mansions commenced in one age, continued in another, and completed a century or centuries afterward. The main building is in the Italian style, the north wing simple or rude as well may be, the southern somewhat more tastily finished; while in the rear, over the roadway, soars a tower, reminding the visitor of the keep of an early modern manor house.

There was no one about; and so I wandered around and marvelled at the taste of the owner and builder. This tower, by guess, sixty or seventy feet high, is a square, with one corner cut off, with heavy iron balconies, richly carved keystones, with deeply cut armorial bearings, marble and stone sculptures let in without regard to artistic design as if dictated by caprice; and, queerest of all, in a niche, aloft, sat a huge Aztec idol, such as is only seen in museums. Shut up and alone, no questions could be asked; but peeping in through a grated window, imagine the surprise at seeing brass guns grinning out between the bars. No other building like it. I will be bound, is to be found along the Hudson. A short distance north of the house are extensive--it might be said enormous--stables and farm buildings overlooking the river, with gate posts crowned with huge eagles or vultures.

These constructions would be in exact keeping with the house were they in stone instead of wood.

From the house, across a deep ravine, by a bridge some forty paces long, a path climbs a hill to a neglected flower-garden, beginning to be overgrown with a new growth of forest, and beyond this again another garden and orchard. The former must have once been beautiful, with beds marked out with luxuriant box; but everything seems neglected except the necessities, such as roads, buildings, which were in good order. The roads were wonderful for such broken ground, and seemed to twist off in every direction, up steep hills and through woods of grand trees. Within the same area it would be almost impossible to find more natural beauties, almost altogether undeveloped by art. Doubtless, the place was once in better condition, for under this gloomy vault of lofty pine and hemlock stood a marble monument; in another place, a pretty little summer house; and in a fresh grassed opening I stumbled over a cistern. Again, out a way, in a level field, in fine order, there was quite a pretty pond, which must have been excavated - not natural, although quite a growth of swamp willow was growing on the sides. Toward the southwest, adjoining the grass land, niched in this country seat, a very attractive Gothic church stood amid fine trees, with a row of massive funeral vaults, as unlike the usual appendages of American country churches as the mansion which first attracted my attention.

While wondering, and admiring the strangeness of my surroundings, my watch told me that time was up, and so I hurried back to the station, pausing once or twice to note and admire some of the finest views of inland scenery, mountain and river, remembered in the course of long journeyings. In my haste I nearly pitched over a precipice, and, trying to recover my road, stumbled into a cemetery devoted to dogs and parrots. Mercy, thought I, is the owner an Egyptian! From his house, he might have been an eclectic admirer of all the orders and creeds of the Old and New Worlds.

But, enough; I made my way through the noble woods, almost as shady in the bright autumn sun as many forests in summer, so numerous were the lofty evergreens, and, on asking at the depot, learned that the owner of this curious place was a General de Peyster. Curiosity demanded more particulars, but the train was at hand and I was off, with my greed for information unsatisfied. And so, at my first leisure, I send you this memorandum of a visit to one of the most beautiful natural situations, and survey of one of the most eccentric or unusual of mansions. With money and art the place might be made one of the finest in our land. As it is, it is queer, but doubtless most comfortable, and everywhere scrupulously clean and orderly. This, however, must be said: From the front of the house, on a point by the way, there is a river view, backed by the Kaatskills, unexceeded in extent and beauty; to the southward the river resembles nothing less than one of the seven lakes which have called forth so much good and bad poetry.

Whoever the owner of this glorious spot may be, I thank him for as pleasant an hour as ever compensated for missing a train.

The next occupant of Rose Hill was the Leake and Watts Children's Home, Inc., successor to the Leake and Watts Orphan House, a family charity of the de Peysters. During its tenure, Leake and Watts used Rose Hill as a summer camp. In 1953, the estate was sold to A. Howard Fingar, a real estate investor. Dorothy Day, now deceased, was a leading figure of the Catholic Worker Movement, in whose interest she acquired Rose Hill. The Catholic Workers are Roman Catholic Socialists who publish the Catholic Worker, a periodical reflecting their faith and ideology. Rose Hill served as a residence for the movement. Miss Day acquired other declining estates in the past for the use of the Catholic Workers.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored jointly by the National Park Service and the Dutchess County Landmarks Association, with grants from the New York Council on the Arts and further assistance from IBM Mid-Hudson Valley, The Richard Hampton Jenrette Foundation, The Rhinebeck Historical Society and Private Donors; during the summer of 1973 and 1974, measured and drawn under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, by Richard Crowley (Architect, Rhinebeck) Project Supervisor, with, during 1973, Kevin Harrington (Cornell University), Historian, Thomas R. Hauch (Ohio State University) and Joseph Bilella (Washington University), Architects, and Gerald Karr (University of Colorado) and Mary Lou Oehrlein (Iowa State University), Student Assistant Architects, and with, during 1974, Susanne Brendel (Columbia University), Historian, and Randy Abramson (Washington University), Robert Ferland (Cornell University), Thomas Fisher (Cornell University), and Stanley Tang (University of Pennsylvania), Student Architects, at Rhinebeck, New York. The historical and descriptive data was edited for HABS in 1981 by Susan Stein, Architectural Historian. Final preparation of the documentation was carried out in the HABS Washington office by Paul Dolinsky, HABS Architect, and Lucy Pope Wheeler, HABS Writer/Editor.